

September 12, 2005

Mike Johanns
USDA Secretary of Agriculture

Mr. Secretary:

We are a fourth generation family farm in northwest Reno County, Kansas. One hundred percent of our income comes from our farm and ranch. We farm 2200 acres, of which we own only 93 acres. We own 130 beef cows and the majority of the pasture is rented. We have a 10 year old daughter and 7 year old son. If they had to decide today, they would definitely be farmers.

My comments concern the farm program. I'm tired of the talk from the Environmental Working Group, the media and some farmers that say 10% of the farmers get 70% of the payments. I don't disagree with the numbers, but of the inferred meaning. Using our operation as an example, our payments are split among 11 people. Ten are landowners, plus us. We are all crop share. Since we are one of eleven, we are 9% of the "farmers" and since we are a two-thirds/one-third crop share split, we get 67% of the payments. Also, all but one of our rented farms are owned by heirs of the previous farmers or the previous farmers themselves.

Some would like payments to go only to producers, thinking in some way this would stop the effect on land prices. The land is the factory so whatever the program, it will effect land prices, good or bad. If only the producer gets payments, the rent will go up because the farmer is the one profiting from the additional payments. I also believe the fastest way to lose farmers is making the payments all go to the producer. Landowners would want to go to cash rent so they could get their share easier. Then the farmer has to come up with cash for rent, 100% of the fertilizer and stand 100% of the weather risk.

There are also those farmers who will bid whatever it takes to get another 100 acres and then not take care of the ground since they bid more than it will return. Yes, eventually they won't make it, but who will be left to farm by then?

For the U.S. to remain competitive in the world market, land grant universities and extension must be supported for their research. I also think the current farm bill and the preceding one have done a pretty good job, mainly because they let the farmer decide what crops to plant.

If the total dollars spent are going to be cut, and I have no problem with that if all government programs are cut and ag production isn't targeted, I would favor all cuts be obtained by lowering the cap on payments and closing loopholes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Norman Roth".

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cc: Pat Roberts
Sam Brownback
Jerry Moran

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Comments from
Farm Bill Forum
Kansas
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